The Hawaiian Star,

DAILY AND SEMI-WEEKLY.

Published every afternoon (except Sunday) by the Hawaiian Star Newspaper Association, Limited.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES.

Local, per annum.....$ 8.00
Foreign, " 12.00

Payable in advance.

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TUESDAY.....DECEMBER 20, 1904

Can Borrow But Can't Spend

Brewer's wharf, Alakea street dock and now the Insane Asylum,—verily there are more difficulties in the way of securing public improvements than those of getting the money for them. The Territory borrowed a million dollars much more easily than she seems able to spend some of the money, and she has paid more interest on idle coin borrowed from New York than it cost to send Secretary Carter to New York to negotiate the first loan or Atkinson the second loan. Wars of contractors with one another or with the Public Works Department have caused long delays in some of the most important works undertaken. The Brewer's wharf contract and the Alakea dock contract were among the most important and the largest in the list of those provided for by the last legislature. Both were urgent necessities, but both were immediately held up by injunctions as soon as awarded and signed. The delay has cost a round sum in interests on idle money and costly litigation. Now the Asylum contract is to be the subject of a contest that promises to be more bitter and therefore longer, than either of the other two.

There ought to be some way to advertise for tenders and award contracts without such difficulties. The federal government does it. Superintendent Holloway would do a public service by studying out some improvements in our method, to be submitted to the legislature in the form of amendments to the laws now governing the subject. Certainly the government should not go on as now, enduring a long legal contest over a large proportion of its contracts for public works.

It is possible that our laws have attempted too much and fallen short like some criminal laws and rules, which try to make evidence-giving such an exact science that under them little or no evidence can be given and which have made some legal documents almost unintelligible sequences of words. Perhaps the laws are trying to bind the Public Works Department to so many nice rules of procedure that they can never all be followed with exactness. After all, statutes should recognize that men, and not machines, are to carry them out and that a little leeway of discretion saves vast opportunities for technical error. Whatever the defects be, they should be ascertained and done away with. A government which can't spend money ought to be ashamed of itself.

Mr. Young's Gum Shoe Campaign

What the people of Honolulu resent in the effort that has been made in Washington to saddle the Alexander Young building on them as a federal building, is the stealth of it. Alexander Young had an undoubted right to attempt to sell his building, if he does not want to keep it as a monument to himself any longer. He had a right to try to sell it to the federal government. But as a sale to the federal government would be for the use of the people of this Territory, the people naturally feel that they had a right to be consulted about it. This community has always held Mr. Young in esteem, and has shown its confidence in him in many ways. It was therefore hardly the requital of their confidence which they had expected, when Mr. Young with a box full of the plans and specifications of his building, started for Washington, by way of Oakland, on his gum shoe campaign, to foist on this community his Bishop street building.

If he had been trying to sell his building to a private individual or a private corporation, so that the sale would simply have been from one private ownership to another, the public would have no right to ask that it be consulted. But when the effort is in effect to sell it to the community itself, through the instrumentality of Congress, it was felt that the community ought to have been consulted.

The subject of a federal building has been taken up in the past as a matter of public interest. A public meeting on the subject has on one occasion, at least, been called. The Chamber of Commerce and the Mrechants' Association, quasi-public bodies, have been consulted on the subject in the past. It seems not unnatural that they might have been consulted in this matter.

How much more confidence in the good will toward him of the community in which he has lived so much of his life and where he made his fortune, if Mr. Young had consulted with it about the proposition, frankly told the community that he believed his building offered the best and quickest realization of their need of a federal building, and sought to have secured their public approval. This would have been open and manly. Even if he failed to get the approval of the community to the scheme, he could not have by it aroused any sentiment against it except on the single question of the fitness of the building for the purpose.

On the contrary, not only did Mr. Young see fit to ignore the natural sentiment of the community that it had a right to be consulted in a matter of such intimate concern to itself, but when it was publicly rumored and reported that he had such a proposal in mind, it was emphatically denied, from a source which the community had a right to assume had his authorization. This seemed to show an indifference to the community, and a contempt for its opinions and sentiments, akin to those expressed by Vanderbilt's "the public be damned."

While the Alexander Young building lacks in almost every particular the requisites, which by custom and law have become fundamental in the design and surrounding of federal buildings—open space between the building and the street line, and suitability of architecture for the climate and dignity of the national government—it will be just as well for the community to be on its guard, and awake to its rights and needs. These "gum shoe campaigns," upon one of which Mr. Young seems to have started in his effort to sell his monument, are very dangerous—sometimes to the gum shoe campaigner and sometimes to those against whom the campaign is directed. But at any rate, it must be remembered that if any unsuitable building is foisted on the community through indifference on its part, it is saddled on them for this generation and the next, if not longer, for new federal buildings in a community are not annuals which grow up with every return of the vernal equinox.

Depew And The Senatorship

Sometimes, what is in its nature, a state or local political contest, becomes a matter of national importance by reason of the issues involved, and sometimes by reason of the personalities engaged. The contest for the senatorship in New York in succession to Senator Chauncey M. Depew is one of the latter kind. Until after the presidential election it was not suspected, by the general public at least, that there was any doubt but that Chauncey Depew would succeed himself with practically no opposition. A man of international reputation as a wit and speaker, a man who has given years of service to the Republican party, a man whose service in the Senate has been dignified, serious, and earnest, if not brilliant or of a quality to make reputation for statesmanship, it was supposed, of course, that Depew would for another six years, if he lived so long, represent the Empire State in the upper house of the National Congress.

It may not be so. Opposition has arisen, and a formidable candidate in ex-Governor Black has come to the front. If Black shall be elected Depew's senatorial career will have been limited to one term, and he will have suffered another disappointment of ambition. For Senator Depew once had presidential ambitions (he may have them yet, but they were avowed at one time) and there were more improbable things in the political horoscope than that Chauncey M. Depew might be president of the United States. In 1888 there was quite a formidable Depew boom for the presidency, and Depew posters and Depew literature was as widely circulated almost, as Hearst posters and Hearst literature was sixteen years later. But Benjamin Harrison was nominated and elected in 1888, and from that Depew as a presidential possibility went into perihelion.

Depew himself seemed to take the view that the presidency was not for him, at least not for a long while, and humbling his ambition he began to plan for a seat in the United States Senate. This ambition was gratified in 1899, when he was chosen by the New York legislature to succeed Edward Murphy.

Chauncey Depew has been before the American public and liked by it for more than a quarter of a century. He is one of the few men who have devoted their lives to the service of a great corporation, who has not suffered from it in public confidence. Notwithstanding that Senator Depew has always been recognized as the mouthpiece and representative of the Vanderbilt system of railroads, he has never shared in the general feeling of distrust with which the public regards men who are bound to the service of great railway or other corporations. This is due in large measure to his frankness and geniality, and to his approachableness. Anybody who had a legitimate purpose in doing so, could always get an audience with Chauncey M. Depew, busy man as he was. And Depew had the happy faculty of turning down requests without hurting the feelings of those who made them.

What Depew really suffered from in the public estimation was his reputation as a wit and humorist. He was known as a humorous after dinner speaker, as a raconteur, and as the perpetrator of many witticisms. Scores of stories about him in these capacities have been published. While they amused and added to the widespread American acquaintance with him, they gave the American people the idea that that was all he was—a wit, a humorist, a raconteur, an afterdinner speaker. They ignored or overlooked the solider qualities which his service with the New York Central Railroad proved he possessed. They made up their minds that he did not possess those more serious qualities they want in the President of the United States, and this alone, if there had been nothing in the conditions and circumstances of the time, would have prevented him from getting the nomination for the presidency at the only time when he ever had any chance for it.

His senatorial career has been largely devoted to demonstrating that he is not merely a humorist, but has a mind capable of serious things. Whether this was in preparation for a possible condition of affairs that might yet bring the nomination for the presidency within his grasp, of course cannot be known unless he choses to reveal it. But while he has been cultivating the serious aspect of his public life, he has been losing in his reputation for frankness, brilliancy and humor, and with the loss of that reputation, in the genial and warm regard in which he is held by the public.

All of which goes to show that while wit and humor and geniality are the salt that gives savor, like salt they are not the nourishing quality.

The account published in another column, of the meeting of the sugar jobbers of the Pacific Coast, probably gives an entirely correct and conservative account of the situation. From this it does not seem likely that the production of granulated sugar by the Honolulu plantation for the San Francisco market is going to create any crisis. The Honolulu plantation people have made all their arrangements, no doubt, for disposing of their crop.